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DIVINE KINGDOM, HOLY ORDER: The Political Writings of Martin Luther By Jarre Carty, editor

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Editor's note: In the previous issue of
Concordia Journal, Paul Robinson reviewed
Divine Kingdom, Holy Order. Here, Ted
Hopkins provides a second perspective on this
important book.

**DIVINE KINGDOM, HOLY
ORDER: The Political Writings of
Martin Luther.** By Jarrett A. Carty, edi-
tor. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing
House, 2012. 525 Pages. Hardcover.
\$59.99.

The most impressive aspect of this new anthology of Martin Luther's political writings is the chronological breadth of the writings and the diversity of genres included within it. Professor Jarrett A. Carty of Concordia University Montreal, Quebec (PhD Notre Dame) has brought together a collection of Luther's writings on politics that almost span Luther's reforming career, covering 1520–1546. In so doing, Carty not only draws from the usual treatises on politics—e.g., *Temporal Authority*—Carty also includes eleven selections from Luther's exegetical writings.

The first part of the book contains Carty's introductory essay, "Luther's Theory of Political Government," which describes the broad strokes of Luther's political thought. Carty considers Luther to be a consistent political thinker since

Luther grounded his politics on an unchanging theological basis. According to Carty, Luther's "central teaching" is the distinction between two kingdoms, the spiritual (*geistliche*) kingdom and the temporal or worldly (*weltliche*) kingdom, which is also the foundation of his political thought (4). These two kingdoms are two separate governments ordained by God to rule "the inner and outer worlds," respectively (206; see also 4–7). The spiritual kingdom rules over the conscience and the soul by the word of God while the temporal kingdom rules over matters of the body by coercion and the sword. For Carty, this distinction is an "interpretative key" for understanding the primary sources, "explaining Luther's view of temporal authority as one of the 'two kingdoms' ordained by God to govern the 'outer man'" (viii). Furthermore, both of these realms are "divinely ordered and biblical," which requires a "strict separation" between the spiritual and temporal kingdoms (10). In this way, Carty emphasizes that political government for Luther is a divine gift and a necessity; it is "a sign" that God is continually in the world through "the provision of order and earthly needs through the temporal government" (11). In fact, secular government is a "holy order" for Luther, limited to temporal matters but nonetheless a holy estate in which a Christian can and should serve God and love her neighbors (15–18).

The second part of the book divides Luther's political writings into three sections: "The Reformation of Temporal Government," "The Political Teachings of Scripture," and "Luther's Applied Political Thought." Before each selection of Luther's writings, Carty includes

a brief introduction of one to five pages, which situates the selection historically within Luther's life and briefly sketches the important content. Thus, Carty makes all twenty-nine of the selections from Luther's writings accessible to the reader by noting Luther's genre and purpose within his historical context in addition to summarizing the content. Because of the introductions, reading through the book in order is helpful, but hardly necessary. Only Carty's introductory essay is necessary in order for the reader to understand Luther from Carty's perspective, which enables the reader to read any selection of interest with a lessened chance of confusion.

The first section, "The Reformation of Temporal Government," contains selections from six of Luther's early writings (1520–1522) and the entire text of *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523). This section develops the frequent distinction in Luther's early works between the inner and outer person, which elucidates both the limits and the extent of the authority of the temporal kingdom. For Carty, the temporal kingdom rules over matters of the body and temporal institutions, the outer person, but has no say in matters of conscience nor can it rule over the spiritual or inner part of a person. Commenting on Luther's 1520 treatise *Christian Liberty*, Carty connects Luther's two kingdoms dualism to the body/soul dualism of human nature, arguing that Luther's theology of the two kingdoms accounts "for the Christian experience of being both saved by grace alone, and yet part of a temporal, natural world, governed by God through natural laws . . ." (75). Carty maintains that these separations between

body and soul and nature and grace are integral to Luther's understanding of the two kingdoms and thus his political thought.

"The Political Teachings of Scripture" is the best section of the anthology. Carty has compiled eleven selections of Luther's political thought from his biblical commentaries, which bring nuance and complexity to Luther's early thought—although Carty does not often recognize this development. For example, Carty includes part of Luther's commentary on Psalm 82, which reveals two places where God's word and politics interconnect. First, Luther calls princes gods among men, but as gods princes are not immune to criticism. According to Luther, preachers are appointed by God to criticize and point out the sins of princes as well as people. Preachers are not only to rebuke the ruler for private sins but also for his public sins, e.g., his failures to keep peace and do justice. In fact, Luther argues, "To rebuke rulers in this way is . . . a praiseworthy, noble, and rare virtue, and a particularly great service to God, as the psalm here proves" (184). Second, Luther contends that good princes follow three virtues: protecting and supporting the teaching and preaching of God's word, furthering the cause of the poor, the orphans, and widows, and protecting against violence and force by peacemaking. These three virtues are *Christian* virtues, which show that God rules the temporal sphere also through his word and command that applies to it.

The third section, "Luther's Applied Political Thought," includes eleven selections from a number of the controversies and issues that Luther attended to from 1524–1546. Important foci of this section

are Luther's notion of just war, Luther's understanding of the government's role in heresy, and Luther's response to the Peasant Rebellion of 1525. In addition, Carty includes a selection on Luther's notion of political resistance and on the government's role in education.

While Carty's anthology is impressive in its chronological breadth and the selections are solid, Carty's introductions misrepresent Luther in two ways. First, Carty does not clearly distinguish Luther's view of the two kingdoms from either a body and soul dualism or from the nature and grace distinction; in fact, Carty seems to equate the two kingdoms with both distinctions (75). The important distinction for Luther, however, is not body and soul, material and immaterial, but flesh and Spirit, *peccator et iustus*. These are completely different paradigms. Moreover, Luther's understanding of God's word working through natural means such as human lips, bread, and water practically destroys any attempt to separate nature and grace. Secondly, Carty does not discuss the relationship between two kinds of righteousness and Luther's political thought. F. Edward Cranz has argued effectively that the two realms of Christian existence, before God and before humanity—not the distinction between spiritual and temporal kingdoms—lies at the heart of Luther's understanding of law and justice,¹ but Carty does not discuss either these two realms or the two kinds of righteousness, which depend on them.

I agree with Cranz that a better case can be made for the two kinds of righteousness underlying Luther's political thought than the two kingdoms: Christian identity granted by God as a

gift drives the Christian into God's world to follow God's commands to do justice and administer righteousness, which includes the role of government. Such a view makes more sense of the interconnections between the word and politics in Luther's thought while maintaining a clear distinction between God's two means to preserve and save his creatures.

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Endnote

¹ *An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society*, Sigler Press Edition (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1998). Originally published 1959.